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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4604

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS (RANKING MEMBER)

FEDERAL LANDS

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SEA POWER AND PROJECTION FORCES

READINESS

FRANKING COMMISSION

November 21, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary, Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

Last month, you published a request for information and comments on proposed per-vehicle and per-visitor fee increases at seventeen of our premiere national parks, including the Commonwealth of Virginia's Shenandoah National Park. In response, I joined dozens of my colleagues in sending you a letter opposing that proposal. Your plan – nearly doubling or tripling entrance fees at some of nation's most loved and picturesque parks during their busiest months – will limit access to our shared public lands, and it will hurt the economies of surrounding communities.

As you know, the National Park System (NPS) was created to preserve and protect national treasures so that all Americans could enjoy them in perpetuity. The proposed rate increases directly contradict that mission, putting a visit to these parks beyond the means of countless families. In particular, a disproportionate number of low-to-moderate-income families, young people, and families of color would essentially be priced out of access to the public lands that their tax dollars help maintain. For example, a parent working a minimum-wage job would have to spend more than a day's pay to get his or her family into these parks. Our parks belong to everyone and these new, exorbitant fees are irreconcilable with your Department's stated mission of improving access to our public lands.

The proposed change would also be an economic disaster for gateway regions – the communities within a 60-mile radius of a national park. In 2016, our national parks attracted a record 331 million visits – a 7.7% increase from 2015 – and trip-related spending produced considerable economic benefits.¹ Last year, visitors spent as much as \$18.4 billion in these gateway regions; their spending resulted in “318 thousand jobs, \$12 billion in labor income, \$19.9 billion in value added, and \$34.9 billion in economic output.”² Many of these communities lack the economic diversification of more developed

¹ https://www.nps.gov/nature/customcf/NPS_Data_Visualization/docs/2016_VSE.pdf

² https://www.nps.gov/nature/customcf/NPS_Data_Visualization/docs/2016_VSE.pdf

areas; any fall-off in visits will inflict severe and immediate pain. Instead of creating a new barrier to entry, we should be encouraging more people to visit both our parks and the surrounding regions.

America's parks must remain open and accessible for all. I urge you to not to adopt the proposed fee hikes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "A. Donald McEachin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

A. Donald McEachin

Member of Congress